



VBA TODAY

V E T E R A N S B E N E F I T S A D M I N I S T R A T I O N

A M E R I C A N P R I S O N E R S O F W A R

Man’s inhumanity to man is legendary, and history is replete with accounts of the brutality of war. However, the most horrific stories are those recounted by the men and women who served their country during times of war, and found their liberty and dignity stripped away while interned as prisoners of war. This month we honor our Former Prisoners of War (POW): those who returned home, as well as those who perished. April 9, 2011 is National Former POW Recognition Day; a day when Americans reflect on the sacrifices these brave men and women made in the past, and in some ways continue to make in service to our nation.

The date chosen to honor these courageous men and women is significant, for on April 9, 1942 Major General Edward King, commander of the U.S. military forces at Bataan in the Philippines, ordered his men to surrender to the invading Japanese army. The U.S. forces stationed on Bataan were woefully lacking in supplies; rations were reduced with each man receiving only a quarter of what was required, resulting in malnourishment and sickness. General King realized his men would not prevail over the advancing enemy forces, and resistance would be futile. He ordered his men to surrender to spare them unnecessary suffering. The brutality and inhumane treatment unleashed upon his men by their Japanese captors was beyond anyone’s comprehension.



Bataan Death March, American POWs marching north to San Fernando

The following day, April 10th, the Japanese gathered approximately 78,000 prisoners, 12,000 of which were American, and began the march north. Prisoners who were too weak or ill to march were executed as they faltered. Barbaric acts were committed against the POWs for the duration of the forced march. Prisoners endured

beatings, bayoneting and being dragged behind vehicles; they were forced to watch as their comrades were beheaded and worse. They were denied food and water, with the Japanese deliberately stopping the POWs in front of artesian wells, forbidding the prisoners to drink, shooting anyone who attempted to slake their thirst.

The march lasted for six days, and at San Fernando, prisoners were packed into boxcars destined for Capas. The boxcars were so overloaded with prisoners that more men perished from suffocation and heat exhaustion. Another seven-

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Soldiers who perished during the Bataan Death March

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mile march brought the survivors to Camp O'Donnell, where some of the prisoners were formed into work details, while others were loaded on to ships and

transported to Japan to be used as labor there.

Accounts of the conditions endured on the "Hell Ships" are almost beyond comprehension. Men packed so tightly into the ship's hold they had only enough room to stand. One bucket of food and one of water was provided daily, and was shared by everyone. This, combined with the intense tropical heat and lack of air circulation, caused disease and death to run rampant amongst the prisoners. Upon arrival, those that survived were transported to prison camps and used as laborers, and through it all the depravity of the Japanese captors, and their brutality continued.

American POWs in the European theater provide a very different account of their captivity, though episodes of mistreatment are not uncommon. However, unlike the Japanese, German captors did make an attempt to abide by the Geneva Conventions. Accounts by American POWs held captive by the Germans detail deprivation and mistreatment, but on rare occasion, also kindness and respect.

Unlike the Japanese POW camps, the German camps did allow visits by the Red Cross, although what visitors were allowed to see was very well orchestrated. Red Cross packages were delivered to the POWs, but as the war turned against the Germans, those packages became evermore scarce.

American POWs held captive during the Korean War had the highest mortality rate during internment. The frigid conditions, lack of medical care and a brutal enemy took a significant toll on the men held in captivity. Those who survived and returned home speak of unimaginable conditions. Likewise, Vietnam War POWs endured similar circumstances, trading frigid temperatures for a tropical climate. Their accounts include brutal treatment not just from their captors, but by the general population as well.



Tower at Stalag VII-A

Reading the accounts of former POWs is difficult, but necessary. The deprivation, brutality and suffering endured by these courageous men and women is so severe that readers must periodically remind themselves that this really happened. Their stories stand as a testament of the resilience of the human spirit, a sober reminder of the depths to which humankind can sink, and a cautionary tale to guard against committing the atrocities they themselves endured at the hands of others.

We honor our former Prisoners of War for their service during times of war, and for their continuing service as they share their stories with generations to come. NOTE: To read accounts of captivity from former Prisoners of War, and other Veterans visit the Library of Congress's Veterans History Project at www.loc.gov/vets/

American Prisoners of War at End of 2007

	Captured and Interned	Died While POW	Returned to U.S. Military Control	Refused to Return to U.S.	Alive at end of 2007
WWI	4,120	147	3,973	—	—
WWII	130,201	14,072	116,129	—	20,327
Korean	7,140	2,701	4,418	21	1,739
Vietnam	725	64	661	—	550
Gulf War	47	25	21	—	21
Somalia	1	—	1	—	1
Kosovo	3	—	3	—	3
Iraq	9	—	8	—	8

St. Louis Regional Alliance For The Troops (RAFTT)

Nearly 1,000 people attended the first citywide event sponsored by the St. Louis Regional Alliance For The Troops (RAFTT). Dave Unterwagner, Director of the St. Louis VA Regional Office and representatives from the VA Regional Office Outreach Team staffed an information booth at the event held on the campus of the University of Missouri, St. Louis on Saturday, January 22, 2011.

The primary goal of the RAFTT Organization is to raise awareness across the community of the services that many organizations (government and non-government) provide to the military and Veterans who live in the region. The mission of RAFTT is to make St. Louis the role model for communities coming together in support of the military, Veterans and their families.

The event was a huge success and OPERATION RAFTT sparked new energy and engagement across the entire community, military, Veteran, corporate, and general public alike. The journey continues....For The Troops.



From left: David Unterwagner, Director, VA Regional Office; Ousman Diallo, Veterans Claims Examiner, Education Division; Marie George, Coach, Education Regional Processing Office.



St. Louis VARO employee staffing VA Benefits Booth -- (left) Mario Lee, Minority Veterans Coordinator; Pam Barth, Coach, PAST Team, Veterans Service Center; (standing) David Unterwagner, Director VA Regional Office; Julie Edwards, Asst. Veterans Service Center Manager

About the Organization

The St. Louis Regional Alliance for the Troops (RAFTT) was founded to coordinate the efforts of the over 250 government and non-government organizations that provide services to the military, Veterans and their families in the greater St. Louis metro area. Their mission is to increase community awareness of organizations and connect those in need with the resources they require, maximizing each organization's impact on those they assist. For more information on RAFTT visit their website at www.raftt.org.



Benefits in brief Former POWs

Former Prisoners of War (POW) are eligible for a host of benefits through the Department of Veteran Affairs. Each regional office has a coordinator that is responsible for assisting former POWs and their survivors and dependents access the benefits they are entitled to.

Former POWs are generally entitled to a presumption of service connection for eight diseases, regardless of their length of captivity, if manifested to a degree of 10 percent or more after discharge or release from active military, naval or air service. The diseases are Psychosis, Dysthymic disorder or depressive neurosis, Post-traumatic osteoarthritis, any of the anxiety states, cold injury, stroke and complications, heart disease and complications; and Osteoporosis, when Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is diagnosed, on or after October 10, 2008.

If a former POW was interned for 30 days or more, the following additional diseases are presumed to be service connected: Avitaminosis, Chronic Dysentery, Helminthiasis, malnutrition, including associated Optic Atrophy, any other nutritional deficiency, Peptic Ulcer disease, Beriberi, Cirrhosis of the liver, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Pellagra and any other nutritional deficiency, Peripheral Neuropathy, except where directly related to infectious causes, and Osteoporosis, on or after September 28, 2009.

Additionally, they receive priority treatment at VA medical centers. Former POWs who have service-connected disabilities are eligible for in-patient and outpatient treatment, as well as nursing home care. Those who do not have a service-connected disability are eligi-

ble for VA hospital and nursing home care, regardless of their ability to pay. They are also eligible for outpatient care on a priority basis, second only to Veterans with service-connected disabilities. All former POWs are eligible for dental care.

Survivors of former POWs may be entitled to receive Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC); a monthly benefit payable to the surviving spouse when the former POW:

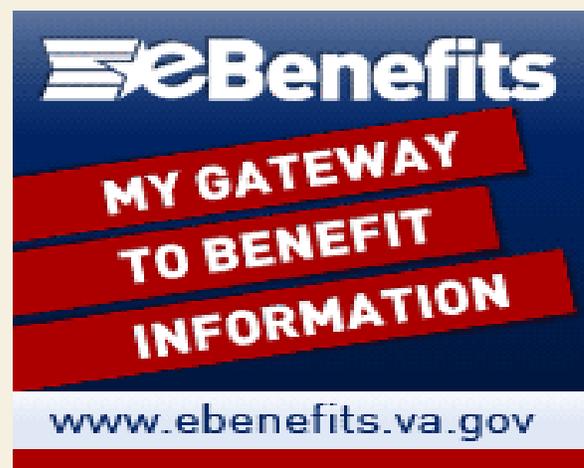
- Was a service member who died on active duty; or
- Died from service-related disabilities; or
- Died **on or before** September 30, 1999 **and** was continuously rated totally disabled for a service connected condition for at least 10 years immediately preceding death; or
- Died **after** September 30, 1999 **and** was continuously rated totally disabled for a service-connected condition for at least 1 year immediately preceding death.

DIC is terminated for a surviving spouse who remarries, but can be resumed if the remarriage ends in death, divorce or annulment. However, a surviving spouse who remarries on or after age 57, and on or after December 16, 2003, can continue to receive DIC.

Other benefits, such as education, loan guaranty, insurance and vocational rehabilitation and employment, to name a few, may also be available. For more information contact the former POW coordinator at your local regional office, or visit www.va.gov.

**Follow your claim
online.**

**Sign up for your
eBenefits account
today!**





On Campus

In June 2009, the Department of Veterans Affairs launched the “VetSuccess on Campus” pilot program to ease service member’s transition from active duty to civilian life. With the induction of the Post 9/11 GI Bill in August of 2009, there has been a dramatic increase in Veterans returning to colleges to prepare for employment. These Veterans are faced with a challenging economy, escalated unemployment rates, and transition from military to campus life.

The VetSuccess on Campus program places a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) on campus to provide resources and support to all Veterans, Veteran dependents, and active duty service members. In addition to the VRC, Outreach Coordinators from

VA’s Vet Centers are also on site to provide peer-to-peer counseling and referral services as necessary. VR&E Service Director Ruth Fanning noted that, “The VRC and Outreach Coordinator are available to address the unique needs of Veteran-students, some with severe disabilities, with a wide range of rehabilitation and personal adjustment counseling to remove barriers and facilitate completion of education programs and entrance into employment.” She goes on to state, “The counselor also provides vocational testing, career and academic counseling, and makes appropriate referrals for more intensive health services, including mental health treatment through VA Medical Centers, Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, or Vet Centers.”

VetSuccess on Campus Counselors are knowledgeable of all VA programs and benefits and are able to assist them in effectively resolving any VA benefit issues. For those Veteran-students needing employment assistance, the VRC assists with services

to help secure suitable employment, including services available through VA, on-campus, and other local community and government sponsored programs. Job placement assistance and coordination with local Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists and Local Veterans Employment Representatives are also offered.

The University of South Florida (USF) was chosen as the first pilot site, and has approximately 1200 Veteran-students utilizing VA benefits. According to the VetSuccess on Campus Counselor, Jeanine Frederick, “There are so many ways to reach out and connect with the Veteran.” During the Fall of 2010, Frederick organized three Veterans Outreach Expos, presented USF’s first Veteran Success Course and

provided benefits information during Veteran specific events such as the Salute to Black Veterans, as well as a kick-off event to support the university’s first Veterans Week. In between events, Ms. Frederick meets with Veteran-students to answer benefits questions and provide referrals for legal aid, non-VA dental services and charitable organizations. VR&E Service Director Ruth



Jeanine Frederick, VRC meets with Elizabeth Mueller to discuss her rehabilitation plan

Fanning noted, “Like the name implies, VetSuccess is aimed at helping Veterans become successful with their educational and career endeavors.” Frederick commented, “Veterans come armed with military experience, but do not always have the degree to land the best jobs. Preparing for a career in today’s market requires a well-rounded approach with a concrete employment objective.” Her advice was welcomed by student-Veteran Elizabeth Mueller, who met with Frederick during her Veteran Success class at USF. “I

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had a general sense of what to do but had no idea how to get there,” Mueller said. With the guidance of Frederick, Mueller participated in Chapter 36, Vocational and Educational Counseling. “It was a team approach,” said Frederick. Through a partnership agreement, Mueller completed vocational testing, exploration, and a KSA course at James A. Haley’s Vocational Rehabilitation Department. Mueller’s employment goal of Human Resource Management was solidified during follow-up appointments. After she completed a four year tour with the United States Air Force working in Security Forces, Mueller began taking classes at USF in the fall of 2010. She admitted, like many students, she picked a major but was uncommitted to the potential employment outcome. According to Mueller, “Having one person to go to has been very beneficial.” Mueller indicated that the guidance and direction she received through the VetSuccess on Campus gave her clarity on her career objective and enlightened her with information related to other benefits.

According to Dr. Larry Braue, Director of the USF office of Veterans Services, “VetSuccess has radically changed the way we serve Veterans here at USF. VetSuccess has enabled us to implement a “one-stop-shop” concept. Veterans don’t have to leave campus to get the support they need. Jeanine Frederick has taken VetSuccess to a whole new level. Her enthusiasm and incredible work ethic has been a blessing to our office and to our Veterans. Our Veterans can count on Jeanine to get them answers and nearly always fix their problems. This has been an incredibly successful collaborative effort and should be the model for all VetSuccess on Campus programs.” Dr. Braue believes that the VetSuccess on Campus program will continue to spread across the country.

Frederick has worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs for over 10 years and has been committed to top notch customer service from the start. Frederick stated, “VetSuccess on Campus is Customer Service. We bring the VA to the Veterans. We provide face-to-face contact with Veterans and their dependents to show them we care.”

Other VetSuccess locations include San Diego State University, Cleveland State University, Arizona State University, Salt Lake Community College, Texas A&M University-Central Texas, Community College of Rhode Island, and Rhode Island College.



Frank Buckles in 1917 at age 16 was the last surviving American WWI Veteran.

REMEMBERING WWI

World War I, or the Great War, as it was known at the time, was supposed to be the war to end all wars. Historians now agree it became the prelude to WWII. Although the war began in the summer of 1914, the United States did not enter WWI until April 6, 1917.

Trench warfare was a defining feature of WWI. An elaborate system of defense was created by both sides because military strategies had not kept pace with advances in weaponry. Nineteenth century infantry tactics were no match for machine guns and barbed wire. Improvements in artillery also made crossing open ground virtually impossible. The Germans introduced the use of poison gas early in the war, which was quickly adopted and used by English and French forces as well.

For much of the war U.S. policy was one of non-intervention. Even after the passenger ship *Lusitania* was sunk by German U-boats in 1915, President



One of the defining features of WWI: Trench Warfare.

Wilson demanded an end to German attacks on passenger ships, and resisted being drawn into “Europe’s” war. Germany complied, only to resume the attacks in January 1917.

The resumption of German U-boat attacks on all marine vessels, combined with the release of the Zimmerman telegram, which offered Germany’s assistance to Mexico in reclaiming the territories lost in the Mexican – American War (Texas, New Mexico and Arizona) if they became Germany’s ally, was the final straw. President Wilson called for war; Congress passed the formal Declaration of War against Germany on April 6, 1917.

After the U.S. joined allied forces the tide of the war began to turn in our favor. Austria tried to negotiate a separate peace without the knowledge of its German allies. The attempt failed, and was made known to Germany, straining diplomatic relationships between the countries. The war finally ended with the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918. There are no surviving WWI Veterans in the U.S. today. Frank Buckles, the longest lived WWI Veteran, passed away on February 28, 2011 and was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.



BURNING QUESTIONS



Do you have questions about VA benefits and don't know where to turn to get them answered? There are many avenues you can investigate, and depending on the information you're looking for, a number of ways to contact VA directly.

One of the best sites for information on VA benefits is www.ebenefits.va.gov. Everyone who has a premium level eBenefits account has access to a plethora of information on VA benefits, as well as the ability to check the status of their pending claim, view their payment history and download documents specific to them. Don't have an account? You can still use eBenefits to research and apply for VA benefits online, and use online tools to calculate insurance and retirement needs and health benefits eligibility. In addition, the eBenefits site has direct links to state Veteran Affairs offices, giving you access to information about Veteran benefits available from your state office.

VA websites are also extremely helpful in researching benefits, and they are constantly updated, ensuring you have the most current information available.

- Department of Veteran Affairs – www.va.gov
- Veterans Benefits Administration - www.vba.va.gov/VBA/
- Veterans Health Administration - www.va.gov/health/default.asp
- National Cemetery Administration - www.cem.va.gov/

In addition to these sites, VA has also launched sites to specific programs that provide even greater detail on individual program areas.

- Post 9/11 GI Bill - <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>
- VetSuccess - <http://vetsuccess.gov/>
- Vet Centers - <http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/>

If you would rather speak to someone about your question or concern, VA's national call centers are available to assist you.

- Compensation & Pension Benefits 1-800-827-1000
- Debt Management Center 1-800-827-0648
- CHAMPVA 1-800-733-8387
- Education – GI Bill 1-888-442-4551
- Healthcare Benefits 1-877-222-8387
- Life Insurance:
SGLI & VGLI 1-800-419-1473

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Or find us online at:

<http://vba.va.gov/VBA/>

All other insurance

1-800-669-8477

- Special Issues (i.e. Agent Orange, etc.) 1-800-749-8387
- Status of Headstones & Markers 1-800-697-6947
- TDD 1-800-829-4833

And finally, by submitting a question through the Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS) you can ask a question via secure e-mail. IRIS is accessed by selecting the "contact us" option on any of the VA websites, and then choosing "Ask a Question."

Life is full of questions, and the answers are sometimes elusive. VA offers a variety of ways to get the information you need, quickly and accurately, reducing the number of pesky questions in your life.

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810 Vermont Ave, N.W.
Washington, DC 20420

VETERANS
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